



Elisha and the Widow's Oil



Scripture Reference:
[2 Kings 4:1-7](#)

Suggested Emphasis:

That we should show compassion, especially to those whose loved ones are ill or have died.

Memory Verse: "He comforts us every time we have trouble so that we can comfort others when they have trouble. We can comfort them with the same comfort that God gives us." [2 Corinthians 1:4, ICB](#)



Story Overview:

A prophet died and left debts his widow and two sons could not pay. The creditor decided to take the two sons as slaves in payment of the debt. When the widow begged for Elisha's help, the Lord miraculously provided them with enough oil to sell and pay off the debt.

Background Study:

After the prophet Elijah was taken to heaven ([2 Kings 2:11](#)), his disciple and successor, Elisha, became the chief prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel. He faithfully continued the work of the Lord as Elijah had done. He travelled on his own throughout the countryside, probably on a donkey led by a servant. He became known for his miracles ([2 Kings 2:19-22](#)).

In one town, a poor widow approached Elisha. Her husband had been a prophet.

This poor widow was unable to pay the debts that her husband had left her with. She had only a small amount of olive oil in her home - nothing else of value. As was the common practice of the time, her two sons were going to have to work for the lender until the money was paid back. In this case, he was going to exact a more harsh payment. They were to become his slaves.

God's servant, Elisha, told the woman to borrow all the empty jars from her neighbours that she could possibly get, close her doors, and begin pouring the oil from her jar into the borrowed jars. As she obeyed, the widow saw that God provided enough oil to fill all the jars.

Almost every time the bible mentions oil, it is referring to olive oil. The oil pressed from the fruit of olive trees had many uses in biblical times. It was a dietary staple. It was spread on bread, used in cooking, and mixed with flour to make bread.

Oil was used as a religious offering ([Leviticus 2:4](#)), as a remedy for stomach distress and as a balm to heal wounds. It was also used as a fuel for lamps in homes. Soldiers often worked the oil into the leather shields they used in battle. This kept the shields from becoming brittle.

Oil was also the base for making perfumes and fragrant ointments. When perfumers boiled oil and then added secret blends of root and bark powders, tree resins and spices, they could make a very expensive ointment. One jar of oil-based myrrh, frankincense, cinnamon and aloe ointment could sell for as much as one labourer's yearly salary.

Oil was a precious item in international trade. Solomon had used it years before to pay for some of the supplies he used to build the temple ([2 Chronicles 2:10](#)).

When the widow told Elisha what had happened, he instructed her to sell the oil and pay off her husband's debts. The woman and her sons were then able to live on the money that was left over. Truly, God provided Elisha to be a friend to this family in their time of need.

[Background Information on the Divided Kingdom.](#)



Way to Introduce the Story:

Bring some olives and olive oil to class today. Talk about some of the uses of olive oil. Let the children taste them. They could dip a little bread in the oil. Put a drop on each child's hand and let them use it as a hand lotion. "Olive oil was very precious in Old Testament times. People would spend a lot of money to buy olive oil. If you were poor, you would be very happy if you had some olive oil to sell. Let's find out about how people in our story today used olive oil."

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The Story:

Elisha was a prophet of God. God would give him important truths to tell the people, and Elisha would preach those to them.

Once, when Elisha passed through a town, he saw a woman with two sons. "Please, sir," the woman said, "I am a widow. My husband was a prophet who served God. When he was alive, he borrowed money from someone. He knew he could work and pay the man back. But then a terrible thing happened - my husband died.

Now that he is gone, we can never pay back the money. I do not have any money left. All I have in my house is a little olive oil. If I had a lot of oil, I could sell it and earn some money, but I do not have enough to sell.

The man that my husband borrowed from said that if I did not pay him back, he would take my sons away to be his slaves. I love my sons and don't want anything bad to happen to them. Please help me!"

Elisha felt sorry for the woman. He wanted to help her. Elisha told the woman, “Tell your sons to go out and gather all the empty jars that they can find. Tell them to borrow jars from your neighbours and friends. They should borrow as many as they can.”

The boys went out and did just as their mother said. They asked all the neighbours and all of their friends to give them their empty jars. Finally, there were no more jars left to find or borrow.

Now, Elisha told the woman and her sons to go inside her house and shut the door. “Use the little bit of oil that you have to fill the first jar and then set it aside. Then, fill the next jar with your little bit of oil. Keep using that same oil to fill your collected jars.”

“How could a little jar of oil fill so many other jars?” the woman thought, “That does not make sense. I will run out of oil.”

But the woman knew that Elisha was a prophet of God, so she trusted that he was speaking the truth. She and her sons did exactly what Elisha told her to. They went inside the house and shut the door. She filled one jar and set it aside. Then she filled another and set it aside. Her sons continued to pass her empty jars to fill. Over and over, she poured from her jar and filled another jar with oil. Her jar always had enough oil, and it did not run out.

Finally, when she asked her sons to pass her another jar, they had to tell her that no more jars were left to fill. The woman and her sons looked around their house and saw all the jars full of oil. What an amazing sight to see!

The woman rushed outside and told Elisha.

“Now you have enough oil!” said Elisha, “Take the oil and sell it. Soon you will have enough money to pay back all of the debts. In fact, you will have enough money left over. You can use that money to make sure you can always buy food and have a place to live.”

The woman and her sons were so happy that Elisha had come to visit them. They used to think their situation was so bad that there was no hope. But Elisha had helped them when they needed it the very most. Now, they did not have to worry about food or a place to stay. The best thing was that now her sons would not be taken away from her! God had blessed this family through the prophet Elisha.

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Ways to Tell the Story:

This story can be told using a variety of methods. Always remain true to the facts found in the Bible but help children connect to its meaning by using drama, visual aids, voice inflection, student interaction and/or emotion.

[Click here for visual aids and story-telling methods.](#)

[Click here to download the slideshow](#) or [click here to download the pictures to print.](#)

Each teacher is unique, so only use the illustrations that best relate to how YOU tell the story in THIS lesson. Too many illustrations can be confusing, so eliminate any that cover other stories or details you do not wish to emphasise in this lesson. As mentioned earlier, this lesson is long enough to divide into two parts, so you may choose only to show some of the illustrations each time.

Review Questions:

1. What was Elisha’s job? He was a prophet of God.
2. Why was the widow with two sons so sad? She could not pay her husband’s debts, so the person they owed was going to take her sons as slaves.
3. What did Elisha tell the woman to send her sons to find? Empty jars
4. The widow only had a little oil. What did Elisha tell her to do with it? Fill all the rest of the jars

5. What did the widow do with all the olive oil? Sold it and paid off her husband's debt

Song Suggestions:

- [Give Me Oil in My Lamp Song](#)
- [Love is Something If You Give It Away Song](#)
- [L-O-V-E Song](#)
- Refer to the [Song Page](#) on this website for more options.

Learning Activities and Crafts:

[\(How to choose the best learning activities for my teaching situation\)](#)

Activities:

- Read and discuss [James 1:27](#).
- Arrange to visit a widow/widower and do some jobs around their house.
- Invite a widow, widower, or orphan (or someone who has been in that position) to come to class and talk about what it is like to live in that situation.
- Bring olive oil to class so children can feel and smell it. Pour a little into a saucer and let the children dip some bread in it to have a taste.
- How about taste-testing some olives?
- Use a bible encyclopaedia to find out ways that olive oil was used in Old Testament times.

Crafts:

- Make a card or gift basket for a widow/widower in the congregation.
- Collect small jars and lids and bring them to class. Help the children pour olive oil into each one and secure the lid tightly. Decorate the jars with ribbons, labels, etc. Add a label or tag that says "Elisha and the Widow's Oil: 2 Kings 4:1-7". Create your own labels or print label strips in the following paper sizes: [Labels in A4 size paper](#) or [Labels in Letter size paper \(USA\)](#).



- Print bookmarks, trading cards or timelines ([printable pages](#)).
- Visit the [Teaching Ideas](#) page for additional activities and crafts.

Other Online Resources:

- [Colouring sheet and puzzle pages \(Calvary Curriculum\)](#)
- [Video: A good video on Youtube depicting this story \(Gracelink\)](#)
- [Nice \(single\) illustration for this story at free-illustration blogspot](#)
- [Daily devotional \(Bible lessons 4 kids\)](#)
- [Lesson Plan for 3rd-5th graders \(Ministry to children\)](#)

